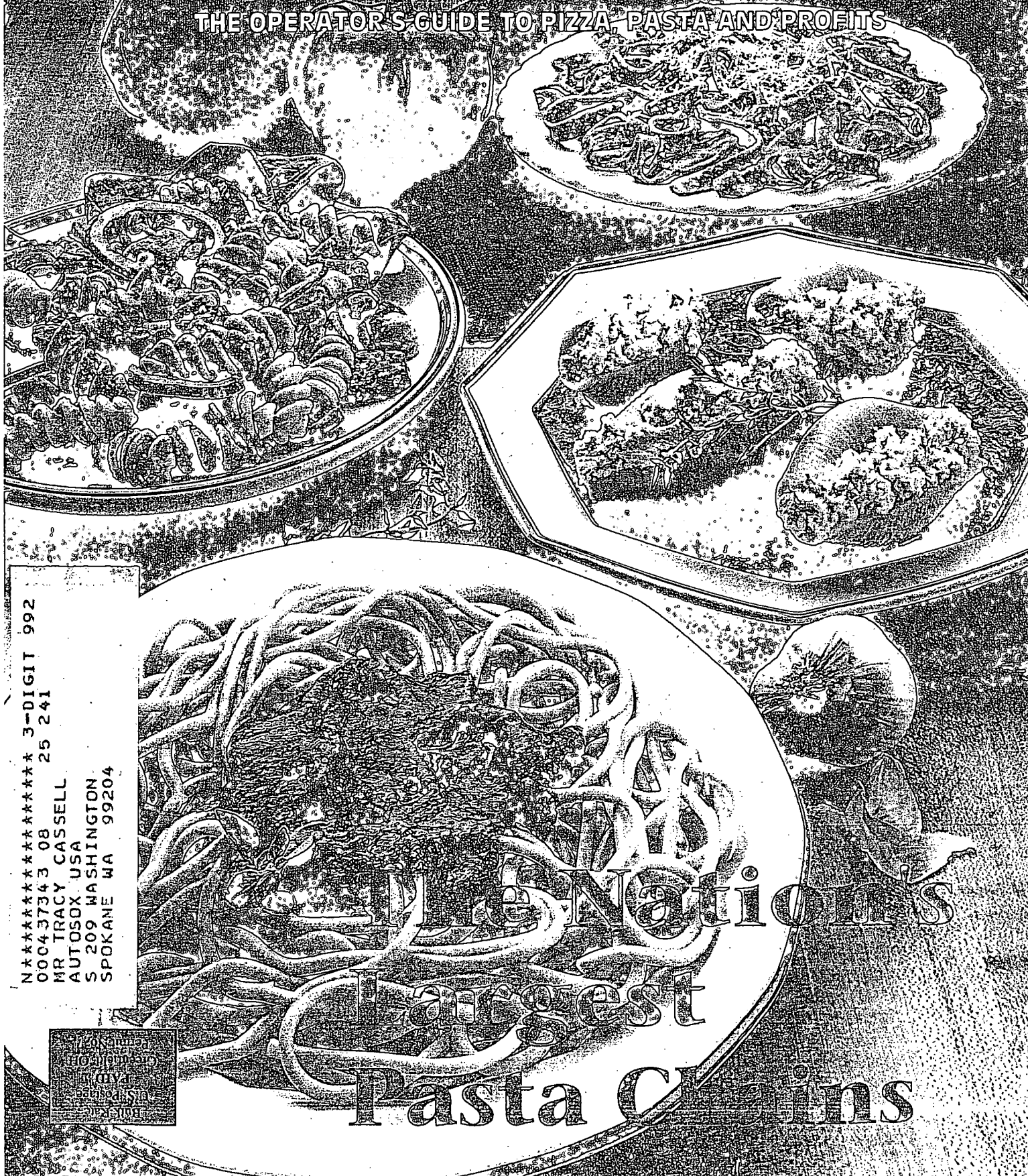


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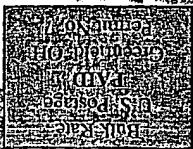
# Viva Italia

THE OPERATOR'S GUIDE TO PIZZA, PASTA AND PROFITS



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Knapp says that energy in the restaurant is a key component to a successful concept today—and that the Italians are a natural fit.

"The whole idea is that it's a touchy-feely culture—an exuberant one that celebrates life," Knapp explains. "The food reflects that, the abundance, the great range and the enormous variety of flavors. It's much more than pasta; it's the total package." Also, the health aspects of pasta tie in well with today's lifestyle, with many sauces tailored to fit those looking for nutrition and complex carbohydrates.

Its low food cost also bodes well for operators, allowing them to value price those pasta dishes and to balance out food costs with less expensive ingredients. Some simpler Italian concepts boast food costs in the low 20s.

A recent report from the National Restaurant Association found that characteristics of consumer's favorite Italian restaurants include serving large portions, having friendly people and service, and featuring fresh ingredients and high food quality.

#### GM Granddaddy of 'Em All

Olive Garden was instrumental in bringing the Italian

style of eating to the masses, with its signature "Hospitaliano" phrase reflecting its corporate culture of driven customer service.

Coined by president Ron Magruder, Hospitaliano is the effort Olive Garden employees give, going that extra mile to make sure that the customer's experience is positive.

"Olive Garden, with its Hospitaliano theme, really focuses on the customers," Knapp observes. "Customers perceive that and tend to come out of the Olive Garden experience having expectations surpassed."

Hitting the 400-unit mark this year, the Olive Garden is facing more competition than ever before and has found that it isn't recession proof as per-store sales have been trending even with previous levels.

To improve service and per-store sales trends, Olive Garden has spent the last nine months regionalizing its stores, tailoring menus and pricing to fit each regional market. The chain now has 110 menus in its 410 units.

"Certain markets are gravitating toward more sophisticated Italian," says Bill Lombardo, vice president of sales and development. "As a result, we are looking at each market more closely."

In some markets, more spices, olive, artichokes and

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